Family Reformation—or, Jacob's Second Visit to Bethel

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DELIVERED BY
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"And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there." Genesis 35:1.

THERE are critical times in most families—times when much decision of character will be needed on the part of the father to guide things aright. They say there is a skeleton in every closet and, if so, I would add that occasionally the unquiet spirit takes to troubling the household and needs to be laid low. There are times when the evil in the hearts of the children and in the nature of the parents becomes especially energetic and brings about difficulties and perplexities, so that if a wrong turn were taken, the most fearful mischief would ensue. And yet, if there is Divine Grace in the hearts of some or all of the family, a strong and gracious hand at the helm of the ship may steer it right gallantly through the broken waters and bring it safely out of its dangers to pursue its journey much more happily in the future.

Now, such a crisis had come to Jacob's family—things had reached a sad pass and something had to be done. Everything seemed out of gear and matters could not continue any longer as they were. All was out of order and threatened to become much worse. Even the heathen began to smell the ill savor of Jacob's disorganized family and the one alternative was mend or end. A stand must be taken by the head of the house. There must be reform in the household and a revival of religion throughout the whole family. If you notice, Jacob himself was in a bad way. His business was to remain in Canaan a mere sojourner, dwelling in tents, not one of the people, but moving about among them, testifying that he looked for "a city that has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God."

He expected to inherit the land, but, for the time being, he was to be a stranger and a sojourner as his fathers Abraham and Isaac had been. Yet at Succoth we read that he built booths—scarcely houses, I suppose—but more than tents. It was a compromise and a compromise is often worse than a direct and overt disobedience of a command. He dares not erect a house, but he builds a booth and thus shows his desire for a settled life. And though it is not ours to judge the purchase of land at Shechem, still, it looks in the same direction. Jacob is endeavoring to find a resting place where Abraham and Isaac had none. I will not speak too negatively, but the Patriarch's acts look as if he desired to find a house for himself where he might rest and be on familiar terms with the inhabitants of the land.

Now the Lord his God would not have it so. The chosen family was intended, by the Divine purpose, to dwell alone and maintain a peculiar walk of separation. The seed of Abraham was ordained to be, in the highest sense, a Nonconformist tribe, a race of separatists!

Their God meant them to be a distinct people, entirely severed from all the nations among whom they dwelt and so they must be. But the inclination to be like their neighbors was very manifest in Jacob's family. The spell of Esau's greatness had, no doubt, affected the clan of Jacob. They had, from the Patriarch, himself, down to the youngest child, made very willing obeisance before "my lord Esau," and the homage paid was not without its effect.

That obeisance was an act which, from some points of view, we cannot condemn, but it was scarcely becoming in one who was a Prince with God and elect of the Most High—and its effect could not have been elevating. The sons seem to have taken very readily to paying homage to profane Esau, though they were not little children, but young men. They bowed before their noble-looking uncle with his grand band of warriors and were, perhaps, fascinated by the charms of so warlike a member of the family, whose sons were dukes and great ones in the land. It added importance to the shepherds to feel that they were related to a great captain!

Now that they had come to Shechem and their father had purchased a piece of land there and had built booths, they felt themselves to be of some importance—and they must go visiting, for everybody loves society. And now comes the mischief of it. Jacob's only daughter must visit with the prince of the people. The daughter of Israel is invited to the dances and the assemblies of the upper circles of the land. It is winked at by the father, possibly, and the brothers aid and

abet it. She is often away at the residence of Shechem, the fine young Hivite prince, a very respectable gentleman, indeed, with a mansion and estates. But there comes an evil matter of it not to be mentioned.

Then her brothers, in their hot anger, run into a sin that was quite as evil as Shechem's crime, by way of making some amends for their sister's defilement. With dastardly treachery they slay the whole of the Shechemites and so bring the guilt of murder upon a family which ought to have been holiness unto the Lord! Children of God cannot mix with the world without mischief! The world does hurt to us and we to it when once we begin to be of the world and like it. It is an ill-assorted match. Fire and water were never meant to be blended. The seed of the woman must not mix with the seed of the serpent. It was when the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair, and took of them as they pleased, that the deluge came and swept away the population of the earth.

Abundant evil comes of joining together what God has put asunder. The corpses of the Shechemites and the indignation of all who heard of the foul deed were the direct result of the attempt to blend Israel with Canaan! And now Jacob's household is filled with fear and the old man, himself—a grand man and a Believer, but a long way off from being perfect—cries out to his sons, in great distress, "You have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites! And I, being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me and slay me. And I shall

be destroyed, I and my house." To this his sons only replied, "Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?"—taking his rebuke in a rough fashion and by no means showing any sense of shame.

They do not appear to have been the worst of his sons and yet their rage and cruelty were most terrible. And when they were charged with their crime they justified it. Wretched, indeed, was the condition of Jacob's household! That family was badly arranged from the very beginning. Polygamy needed not to be denounced in so many words in Scripture, because the specimens given of it are all so thoroughly bad that no one can doubt that the thing is radically vicious in its mildest form. It worked shockingly in the case of Jacob. His wife Rachel, whom he loved so well, had, I fear, been the cause of the introduction into the family of idolatry in the form of teraph, or symbol-worship. She had learned it from her father, Laban, and secretly practiced it. And if Jacob was aware of it, he did not like to say anything to her, his darling, the queen of his soul.

Those bright eyes which had charmed him years ago—how could he dim them with tears? The children of Leah took up their mother's cause and the sons of the handmaids sided with each other—and this made trouble. The many mothers of the family created difficulties and complications of all sorts, so that the household was hard to arrange and keep in good order. It was not what a believing household should be and it is not amazing at all that affairs so thoroughly went awry that it appeared as if even the salt was losing its savor and the good seed was dying before it could be sown in the earth and made to bring forth fruit! A stand must be made. Something had to be done and Jacob must do it.

The Lord comes and He speaks with Jacob. And since the good man's heart was sound towards God's statutes, the Lord had only to speak to him and he obeyed. He was pulled up short and made to look at things and set his house in order. And he did so with that resolution of character which comes out in Jacob when he is brought into a strait, but which at other times is not perceptible. We shall take up this incident at this time and may God grant that we may find practical teaching in it for ourselves and for our families, by the guidance of His gracious Spirit.

Notice, first, God having appeared to Jacob—what was to be done? Secondly, what happened in the doing of it? And thirdly, what followed.

I. First, then, WHAT WAS TO BE DONE? The first thing to do was to make a decided move. God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there." You must hasten away from Shechem, with its fertile plains, and make a mountain journey up to Bethel and dwell there. You have been long enough near these Shechemites. Mischief has come from your being so intimate with the world. You must cut a trench between yourselves and the associations you have formed and you must go up to Bethel and remain there.

Every now and then, dear Brothers and Sisters, we shall find it necessary to say to ourselves and to our family, "We must come out from among worldlings. We must be sep-

arate. We are forming connections which are injurious to us and we must snap the deceitful bonds. We are being led into habits and customs in the management of the household which are not such as God would approve. We are doing this to secure favor of one and doing that to escape frowns from another—and we are not walking straight with the Lord—therefore, to bring us back to our moorings, we must come

right out and go to Bethel, to the place where God met with us at the first. We must go to our first trysting place and meet with our Lord again, cost whatever the journey may.

"Though some may feel it to be a cross, yet we must begin again and work upon the old lines. Back to our old Puritanism and precision we must go and renew our vows. Let us go right away from worldliness and get to the Bethel of separation and draw near to God again." Have you ever found, Beloved, when you have been very deep in business and very much in the world that you begin to feel heart-sick and cry, "It won't do, I must get out of this! I must retreat into a holy solitude and enjoy a little quiet communion with God"? Have you not sometimes felt, concerning your family, "We are not serving the Lord aright, nor becoming more holy or devoted. Everything appears to be going downhill. We must steer the other way. We must alter our present declining state, in the name of God, or else we cannot expect to have His blessing." I know that you have come to such a place and have resolved to take a decided step. May the Lord help all of us when we see clearly that something is to be done. May we have Grace to end sinful hesitation and set about amendment at all hazards.

Now they must revive old memories. "Go up to Bethel and dwell there. And make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto you when you fled from the face of Esau, your brother." A revival of old memories is often most useful to us, especially to revive the memory of our conversion. The memory of the love of our espousals, when we went after the Lord into the wilderness and were quite satisfied to be denied and disowned of all—so long as we might but dwell near to Him—that memory is right good for us! It is well to recall that hallowed hour when we, for the first time, set up a family altar and with our dear ones bowed before the Lord! Then we felt that the separated place was a very sweet one and we were most glad to get right away from the world and to live with Christ and in Christ and for Christ and like Christ.

We cannot help blushing as we remember those early days. We did not think that we should have fallen so far short of our ideal. Let the recollection of Bethel, then, come over us to make us remember the loving kindness of the Lord and mourn over our own spiritual declensions. Are you singing—

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still,
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill"?

Then you must come back to your first hours of communion. Where you lost your joy you will find it, for it remains where you left it! If you have neglected your prayer closet. If you have ceased from the searching of the Word of God. If you have departed from a close walking with Christ and if you and your families have fallen into a very low state, so that strangers who look in would hardly know whether yours is a godly house or not—if it is so, then go back mourning and sighing to Bethel and pray that the old feelings may be revived in you. God grant they may!

And may you, in addition, be led to cry, "How could I have departed so much from the living God? How could I have played the fool and gadded about so much when I might have rested still, in peace, if I had lived near to God?" This, then, was the work which was to be done by Jacob. He had to, first, make a decided move and, secondly, to revive old memories! Have you any call to the same course of action? If so, see you do it. But now, again, Jacob must keep an old vow. I do not quite remember how many years old that vow was, but I suppose some 30 or so. Yet he had not kept it. He was much younger when he knelt and said, "If You will be with me," and so on, "then this place shall be God's house."

He has forgotten that vow, or at least he has not fulfilled it all these years. Be very slow to make vows, Brothers and Sisters—very slow. They should be but very seldom made because all that you can do for God you are bound to do as it is—and a vow is often a superfluity of superstition. But if the vow is made, let it not wait beyond its time and complain to your God. An old and forgotten vow will rot and breed most solemn discomfort to your heart. At first it will gnaw at your conscience. And if your conscience, at last, grows hardened to it, others of your powers will suffer the same petrifying process. Moreover, a forgotten vow will bring chastisement on you and perhaps the rod will fall upon your family.

The connection between Jacob's not going to Bethel and the mischief that happened to his daughter, Dinah, and the sinning of his sons, Levi and Simeon, may not be distinctly traceable, but I feel persuaded that there was a connection— the sin of omission in the father led on to sins of commission in the sons. With the sins of his children, the Lord chastened Jacob for his breach of promise. Note that the Lord does not remind Jacob of his wrong, nor chide him for it, but He

puts him in a position in which he will remind himself of it. It is so gentle—I was going to say so courteous of our God— He is so gentle, so tender, that He would rather His servant should remember the vow than be distinctly told of it in so many words. See, then, Jacob is bound to go and do according to his solemn pledge.

Now, dear Friend, it may be that part of the business you and I have to do in order to set our families right is to remember something we said we would do years ago but which we have not done. We have had the ability for a long while, but the willingness has not been with us. Let us now bestir ourselves and clear our consciences in the matter. God alone knows of it—let not this secret thing lie festering in our hearts and grieving the Holy Spirit!

I speak, I believe, very closely home to some of my hearers. Perhaps the message is sufficiently distinct and I had better say no more. Let your own hearts remember your neglected promises.

It appeared to Jacob, next, that if he was to fulfill his vow, it was necessary to reform his whole house, for he could not serve the Lord and worship other gods. He said to all that were with him—to his sons first and then to his hired servants and the rest—"Put away the strange gods that are among you." Yes, it must come to that! If I am to get back to my old position with God I must break my idols—

"The dearest idol I have known, Whatever that idol be, Help me to tear it from its throne, And worship only Thee."

The idols of the family—the acts and deeds of the young folk which would grieve God, the doings of the elder ones which are inconsistent with a profession of faith in Jesus, the ill tempers that have been indulged, the divisions of heart which have come up in the family—all that is sinful and unlovely must go, if we are to get right again. There must be a general breaking and burying of idols, or we cannot worship the God of Bethel!

And next Jacob said, "Be clean." There was to be, I suppose, a general washing indicative of purgation of character by going to God with repentance and seeking forgiveness. Jacob also said, "Change your garments." This was symbolic of an entire renewal of life, though I fear they were not all renewed. At any rate, this is what was symbolized by, "Change your garments." Alas, it is easier to say this to our families than it is to get them to do it! And do we wonder since it is so much easier for ourselves to say than it is for ourselves to do! Yet, Beloved, if your walk is to be close with God. If you are to commune with the God of Bethel, you must be cleansed. The Lord cannot commune with us while we wallow in sin. "What accord has Christ with Belial?"

Sin must be put away! The best Believer that lives must wash his feet if he is to draw near to God as he has done before. All this Jacob was to undertake and to him, who had become so lax with his family, it was no small work to screw up his courage and say to Rachel and all of them—"Put away the strange gods that are among you and be clean. And change your garments." Well, then, the next and last thing which they were to do was to celebrate special worship. "Let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress and was with me in the way which I went."

When we get wrong and feel that there must be a decided change, we must set apart special times of devotion. We must say to our soul, "Soul, Soul you have fed so little lately. This leanness of yours comes of neglecting spiritual feasting. Come, you must humble yourself! You must lay yourself low before God. You must approach the Lord with lowly reverence and beg to be refreshed with His Presence. You must set apart more time for feeding upon Christ and upon His Word. You must never be quiet till you become, again, full of Divine Grace and of the Holy Spirit." In families it is often well, when you see that

things are wrong, just to call the household together and say, "We must draw near unto God with peculiar earnestness, for we are going astray. We have not given up family prayer, but we must now make it special and with double zeal draw near unto God."

I am afraid that some of you neglect family prayer. If you do I am sure it will work evil in your households. The practice of family prayer is the castle of Protestantism. It is the grand defense against all attacks by a priestly caste who set up their temples and tell us to pray there and pray by their mediation. No, but our homes are temples and every man is a priest in his own house! This is a brazen wall of defense against superstition and priestcraft! Family prayer is the nutriment of family piety and woe to those who allow it to cease!

I read the other day of parents who said they could not have family prayer. Someone asked this question, "If you knew that your children would be sick through the neglect of family prayer, would you not have it? If one child was

smitten down with fever each morning that you neglected prayer, what then?" Oh, then they would have it. "And if there were a law that you should be fined five shillings if you did not meet for prayer, would you find time for it?" Yes. "And if there were five pounds given to all who had family prayer, would you not by some means arrange to have it?" Yes. And so the enquirer went on with many questions and wound up with this last one—"Then is it not just an idle excuse when you, who profess to be servants of God, say that you have no time or opportunity for family prayer?"

Should idle excuses rob God of His worship and our families of a blessing? Begin to pray in your families and especially if things have gone wrong, get them right by drawing near to God more distinctly. Did I hear you say, "We do not want to be formalists." No, I am not afraid you would be! I am afraid of your neglecting anything that tends towards the good of your household and your own spiritual growth and, therefore, I pray you labor at once to acquaint yourselves with God and be at peace. Draw near the Lord, again, more thoroughly than you have done before, for it is the only way by which the backslidings of persons and families are at all likely to be corrected! God grant a blessing with these words by the power of His Holy Spirit.

II. And now I come to my second point—WHAT HAPPENED IN THE DOING OF IT? Well, several things

happened and one or two of those were rather surprising. The first was that all heartily entered into the reforming work. I am sure they did, because the 4th verse says, "They gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hands"—all of them—"and all their earrings which were in their ears." He had not said anything about their earrings. Was there any harm in their earrings? For a woman to wear an earring is not such a dreadful thing, is it? Perhaps not, but I suppose that these earrings were charms and that they were used in certain incantations and heathenish customs. It must have been a very sad discovery to

Jacob, who himself could not have endured it, to find that wicked superstitions had come into his tents through his winking at the teraphs.

The evil had gone on in secret and though suspected, was not actually under Jacob's eye. I dare say he was not quite sure that the teraphs were in the tent and did not want to be quite sure, because it was Rachel, you know, who had them, and she—well, she was Rachel—and she had been brought up so differently from Jacob that perhaps Jacob thought he must not press her too severely upon the point. Perhaps he said to himself, "When I talk with her she does not seem at all idolatrous. I believe she is a good woman and I must remember how she was brought up. And as she comes from a high-church family I must let her have her little symbols—I do not know for sure that she has a teraph—I have never absolutely seen it." But there it was and it was the nucleus of superstition! She and those around her had become corrupted with the superstitions of the heathen—and these earrings were the indication of their superstitious feeling, if not the instruments of divination!

Now, as soon as Jacob speaks, they all give up their idols and their earrings. I like this. It is a blessed thing when a man of God takes a stand and speaks, and finds that his family are all ready to follow. Perhaps it was the fear that was upon them just then—the fear of the nations round about which made them so obedient. I am not sure it was a work of Divine Grace, but still, as far as outward appearances went, there was a willing giving up of all that could have grieved the Lord. And you will sometimes be pleased, Christian Friends, when things get wrong and you determine to set them right, to see how others will yield to your determination. You ought to take courage from this. Perhaps the very person of whom you are most afraid will be the most ready to yield and the most eager to help!

You have been afraid of Rachel, but she has such love for you that she will do anything for you and give up her teraphs at once. The sons who were so rough in speaking to you when you spoke in your own name and spoke about yourself and said, "You have made me to stink," and so on, will answer very differently when you speak in God's name! There will be such a power going with God's Word that they will yield freely and heartily. They did so in Jacob's case. All of them gave up their idols and they buried them in the earth beneath the oak. Would God a day would come to old England when all the crucifixes and priestly vestments—and the whole ruck of the symbols and emblems of superstition—could be buried under some grand old Gospel oak, never to be disinterred again! If we do not see this in the nation we will at least secure it in our own houses.

Another circumstance happened, namely, that protection was afforded him—immediate and complete. "They journeyed and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob." In their way were many cities and, as it were, hemmed them in and the people might have turned out and cut the little tribe of Israel to pieces. But a message had gone forth from the Lord of Hosts, saying, "Touch not My anointed,

and do my Prophets no harm." And so they journeyed in safety. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him," and now that Jacob has determined to set things right, he walks unharmed!

You do not know how much of personal trouble which you are now bearing will vanish as soon as you determine to stand up for God! You do not know how much of family difficulty that now covers you with dread will vanish when you, yourself, have feared the Lord and have come forth decidedly and determinedly to do the right thing. No danger shall befall the man who walks with God, for with such a Companion malaria breathes health and curses become blessings! But you know not where you are going and into what thick woods you plunge when you once forsake the Lord and walk contrary to His mind. The Lord your God is a jealous God and if you do not respect His jealousy and walk before Him with holy fear, you shall be made to feel His wrath! Since He has known you, only, of all the people of the earth, for that very reason He will chasten you for your iniquities. This plague of evils shall be stopped when you purge out your idols, but not till then!

In the next place the vow was performed. They came to Bethel and I can almost picture the grateful delight of Jacob as he looked upon those great stones among which he had lain down to sleep, a lonely man. Perhaps he searched for the stone that had been his pillow. Probably it still stood erect as part of the pillar which he had reared in memory of the goodness of God and the vision he had seen. There were many regrets, many confessions, many thanksgivings at Bethel! "With my staff I came to this place, but now I am become two bands. Look, my sons! Look, Rachel! Look, all of you— this is the spot where, when I fled from Esau with nothing but my staff and wallet, I laid down and the Lord appeared to me! And He has kept me all my life long! Come, help me as I put together the unhewn stones to make an altar. And this great stone, behold we will pour oil on the top of it and we will together sing the praises of El-Beth-el—the God of the House of God, the God who is a House for His people, the God who has a household of which we form a part—the God under whose wings we seek refuge."

I have no doubt that Jacob and his house spent a very happy time at Bethel, where mourning softened thankfulness and joy sweetened penitence—where every sacred passion in the Patriarch's soul found vent and poured itself out before the Lord. He thought of the past, rejoiced in the present and hoped for the future, for now he had come to be with God and to draw near to Him. But what else happened? Why, now there came a death and a funeral. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died. Her name means a bee. And we have had old nurses, ourselves, have we not, who have been like busy bees in our household? Dear old Deborah nursed our mother and nursed us and is still willing to nurse our children! We do not grow that sort of people, now, they tell me. I am afraid we do not grow the same kind of masters and mistresses that they used to have in years gone by, either!

I am not sure about it, but I believe that if there were more Rebekahs there would be more Deborahs. Somehow I think we are generally about as well treated as we treat others and we get measured into our bosoms very much that which we ourselves measure out. There may be exceptions and there are, but that is the general rule. Well, dear old Deborah had left Laban's house and gone with Miss Rebekah when she went into the far country to be married. She had taken care of her mistress' two boys, Jacob and Esau, and had set her heart on the same boy that the mother loved so well and she had sorrowed with Rebekah when he, having grown up, had been compelled to save his life by fleeing from his father's household.

I cannot tell when she came to live with Jacob. Perhaps Rebekah sent her to live with her favorite son because she thought there were so many in the family that somebody was needed to look after them all—a person old and discreet to come between Jacob and the perpetual jars of the household. No doubt Jacob often found it pleasant to make the good old soul a confidante in his troubles. And now she dies and they bury her under the oak which they call the oak of weeping—Allonbachuth. Is it not strange that when you are trying to get right, there comes a great sorrow? No, it is not strange, for you are trying to purge out the old leaven—and the Lord is going to help you. You are trying to set everything right with Him and He comes and takes away one of the best people in the house who helped you most of all—one of the staunchest old Christian people that you ever knew—whom you wanted to live forever!

And He does it not to hinder but to help you in your labor. He knows best—a touch of the pruning knife was needed by the vine of Israel that it might bring forth more fruit. The good nurse died when they seemed to need her most, but it was better for her to die then, than that she should have departed when Dinah's shame and Simeon's crime had made the household dark. It was better that she should live to see them purged from idols and on the road to her old master Isaac,

for then she would feel as if she could say, "Now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation."

The moral of the incident is that the Lord may heat the fire all the more when He sees the refining process going on and we must receive the further trial as a token of love and not of anger if He smites us heavily when we are honestly endeavoring to seek His face.

III. This is what happened while they were doing it. Now we close with the third head, namely, WHAT FOLLOWED. All this putting away of idols and going to Bethel—did anything come of it? Yes. First, there was a new appearance of God. Read the 9th verse. "And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed Him." This was a new appearance of God. Some of you will not understand what I say, but I leave it to those who know the Lord—there are times when God is very near to us. I wish it were always so, but some of us can mark out epochs in our spiritual history in which we were wonderfully

conscious that God drew near to us. We felt His Presence and were glad. The Lord seemed to put us in the cleft of the rock and make His Glory pass before us.

I have known such times. Would God I knew them more often! It is worth while to have been purged and cleansed and to have done anything to be favored with one of those Divine visits in which we almost cry with Paul, "Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell: God knows." A clear view of God in Christ Jesus and a vivid sense of Jesus' love is a sweet reward for broken idols and Bethel reformations!

The next thing that came of it was a confirmation to Jacob of his title of Prince which conferred a dignity on the whole family. For a father to be a prince ennobles all the clan. God now puts upon them another dignity and nobility which they had not known before, for a holy people are a noble people. You that live in God's Presence are in the peerage of the skies. "He raises up the poor out of the dust and lifts the needy out of the dunghill that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people." He first makes them princes and then, to crown it, He makes them princes of princes, because if all His people are princes, it follows that those who are princes among His people are princes among princes! The Lord has a way of conferring high spiritual dignities upon those who seek to order their households aright and to keep their hearts clean and chaste before Him. Such honor have all the saints who fully follow the Lord. God help us to keep close to Jesus and enjoy daily communion with Him.

And then, next, there was given to Jacob and his family a vast promise which was, in some degree, an enlargement of a promise made to Isaac and to Abraham before. "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall be of you and kings shall come out of your loins." I do not remember anything said to Abraham about a company of nations, or about kings coming out of his loins, but out of the loins of Israel, a prince, princes may come. God puts upon His promise a certain freshness of vastness and infinity now that Jacob has drawn near to Him. Brothers and Sisters, God will give us no new promise, but He will make the old promises look wondrously new! He will enlarge our vision so that we shall see what we never saw before!

Have you ever had a painting which hung neglected in some back room? Did it, one day, strike you that you would have it framed and brought into a good light? When you saw it properly hung on the wall, did you not exclaim, "Dear me! I never noticed that picture before. How wonderfully it has come out"? And many and many a promise in God's Word will never be noticed by you till it is set in a new frame of experience. Then, when it is hung up before you, you will be lost in admiration of it! Sin makes the promises to be like old pictures coated over with dirt. There must be a cleansing of ourselves and then it will be like a careful cleaning of the picture, from which no tint suffers, but all receive a new bloom.

God will make His Bible seem a new book to you. You will find joy in every page and your soul shall dance for joy as you see the great things which God has prepared for you,

yes, and for your children, also, if they are walking in the truth, for, "the promise is unto us and to our children, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call." With Jacob, by the new appearing of the Lord, the inheritance was confirmed, for thus runs the Scripture—"The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to you I will give it and to your seed after you will I give the land." So, dear Friends, all the blessed Covenant of Grace with all the promises shall be made distinctly and clearly yours when you have gone to Bethel and, with holy decision, drawn near to the Lord your God!

I will not detain you except to say that you may also expect very familiar communion. Notice the 13th verse, "God went up from him in the place where He talked with him." Talked with him! Talked with him! It is such a familiar word.

God talking with man. We say "conversing" when we are speaking in a dignified manner, but, "talking!" Oh that blessed condescension of God when He speaks to us in the familiar tones of His great love in Christ Jesus! There is a way of conversation with God which no tongue can explain—they only know it who have enjoyed it! Brethren, there are fellowships with God to be enjoyed of which a large number of Christians have no idea. He who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in Heaven and earth dwells with lowly ones! Idols broken, garments changed, altars built and the soul kept near to God—and then "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him and He will show them His Covenant." This is so inestimably precious a gift that I urge you to seek after it, urging myself most of all.

The chapter closes with the death of Rachel and so, perhaps, when we get nearest to God there may come another trial. The old tradition was that no man could see God's face and live. It was not true, but it contained a truth, for scarcely can a man enter the secret place of thunder and have communion with God without special trial. Yes, it is even so, for "even our God is a consuming fire." He asks the question, "Who shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?" And the answer is, "He that has clean hands and a pure heart, that shuts his ears from hearing of blood" and so on. "He shall dwell on high."

When we come to dwell with Him who is fire, the fire must burn and we must feel it. That hallowed flame will consume much that our unhallowed flesh would like to keep and there will not be a burning without our enduring sharp smarts and pain. God's furnace is in Zion and His fire is in Jerusalem. He will purify the sons of Levi as silver is purified. "Who shall abide the day of His coming? For He will be as a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap." Yet if we are in a right state, that is exactly what we need! O that our sinfulness were wholly burned up! Trial is welcomed if sin may but be conquered! Even Rachel may die if Jesus lives in us but the more!

Lord, give us Grace and Your Presence—even if we pass through the furnace a thousand times in consequence thereof. Hear us, for Jesus' sake! Amen.